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TAGS: PREL PTER KPAL IS EG  
SUBJECT: PUSHING EGYPT ON BORDER SECURITY

REF: A. CAIRO 626  
    1B. 06 CAIRO 6771  
    1C. 06 CAIRO 6365  
    1D. 06 CAIRO 5926

Classified by DCM Stuart Jones for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

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Summary  
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11. (C) Complex institutional, political, economic, and social factors impact Egypt's counter-smuggling efforts along the border with the Gaza Strip and Israel. Efforts to counter terrorism related to smuggling are more effective than those directed at contraband. GOE effectiveness will continue to fall short, but we recommend that we encourage and support expanded border security programs with all concerned ministries, including the Ministry of Defense, which oversees the Border Guard Forces (BGF), and the Ministry of Interior, responsible for the Central Security Forces (CSF), which augments the BGF and monitors the border south of Gaza. End summary.

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Impediments to the Counter-Smuggling Effort  
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12. (S/NF) Internal coordination problems among concerned ministries, public sympathy towards the Gaza Palestinians, and a reluctance to press Israel to agree to more BGF in the Sinai all hinder the counter-smuggling effort. The Ministries of Interior and Defense, overseeing the CSF and BGF respectively, do not appear coordinated with the Egyptian General Intelligence Service (EGIS). After repeated visits to the border, we see no evidence of an effective interagency GOE plan to stop the movement of terrorism-related smuggling before it reaches the border area.

13. (S/NF) Nonetheless, opportunities for cooperation and partnership exist. In a meeting with the Ambassador on March 21, EGIS Chief Soliman reaffirmed that EGIS is working diligently to quash terrorism-related smuggling. Tunnel detection remains steady; the GOE has discovered 115 tunnels since September 2005. While there are serious structural and political impediments to interdicting the smugglers, the GOE could enhance effectiveness by addressing the following issues:

-- According to the defense ministry's Rules of Engagement

(ROE), the BGF do not destroy the feeder tunnels, and instead simply seal them off or destroy the openings. While physically entering the tunnels would be too dangerous, the BGF should use more aggressive techniques to destroy the network.

-- Poorly paid and equipped CSF lack the incentive or oversight needed to enhance their commitment; defense ministry officials reject suggestions to make border security a higher priority by using U.S. FMF or IMET to enhance BGF training; and,

-- The GOE does not currently map discovered tunnels with GPS to acquire a comprehensive sense of the network.

¶4. (C) Myriad economic and social factors likewise impact the counter-smuggling effort:

-- The lack of normalized border crossings (through the Agreement on Movement and Access) between Egypt and Gaza at Rafah or Karem Shalom create economic incentives to smuggle contraband and generate sympathy to protect Gaza Palestinians' access to goods.

-- Political frustration and poor economic prospects among the disenfranchised Sinai Bedouin encourage smuggling for income. A GOE crack-down on commercial smuggling would worsen GOE-Bedouin relations, which have remained tense since the mass arrests of Bedouin beginning in 2004 following bombings in the Sinai.

The GOE appears to be striking a balance at the expense of more aggressive policing. But progress on the AMA, in particular, would limit the commercial smuggling and ease identification of terror-related smuggling.

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Potential for Cooperation  
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¶5. (C) We anticipate that MoD would accept some degree of technical assistance but would resist pressure to accept either training or programming if so doing would impact current FMF programs or funding priorities. We will also explore border security cooperation, for example by increasing attention to smuggling "pipelines" (Sudan-to-Sinai and cross-Sinai). Recognizing the key role that political and economic factors will continue to play, we propose the following measures to influence the GOE's capacity and will:

--press the Ministry of Defense to use IMET for border security training with an aim to developing a leadership base;

--encourage GOE acceptance of Export Control and Border Security (EXBS) consultations and technical assistance;

--expand our collaboration with customs, finance, and trade officials to focus their attention on the Sinai; and

--offer a DOD-sponsored border security experts-level seminar in Cairo to all concerned ministries.

¶6. (C) We would also welcome an assessment of the potential for a renewal of Egyptian-Israeli discussions on placing more BGF in the Sinai. Israel's deployment of a new counter-smuggling brigade (the "Sagi Brigade") may give the Egyptians additional justification for their request to place more BGF in the Sinai. Negotiations will inevitably drag out, but even the political optic of engagement and cooperation could be a plus for both sides.

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